

## Rewriting the rules

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**Rewriting the rules:  
gender, bodies and monastic legislation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries**

**Abstract**

The early twelfth century has long been recognised as a period of monastic expansion and adaptation, in which old rules (such as the Rules of Benedict and Augustine) were reshaped to fit new forms of life. This process of adaptation continued into the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, as the founders of new religious communities continued to grapple with perennial problems and questions. A particularly intractable set of questions related to the care of nuns (the *cura monialium*), and to the practicalities of reconciling spiritual equality with bodily difference.

This article explores two inter-linked responses to these questions, namely the *Institutes* of the Order of Sempringham, and the legislation of the Dominican convent of San Sisto, Rome. The Rule of Augustine, with its emphasis on preaching and pastoral care, could be adapted to provide a self-regulating, homeostatic solution to some of the problems of the *cura monialium*. A particularly innovative feature of the *Institutes* of the Order of Sempringham was the use of a complex series of windows and doors, which could be adopted by other groups seeking to balance the tension between institutional integrity and physical segregation.

**Keywords**

*Cura monialium*; Heloise; Abelard; Rule of Benedict; Rule of Augustine; Gilbertine; Sempringham; Dominican.

**Rewriting the rules:  
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At present the one *Rule* of St Benedict is professed in the Latin Church by women equally with men, although, as it was clearly written for men alone, it can only be fully obeyed by men, whether subordinates or superiors. Leaving aside for the moment the other articles of the *Rule*, how can women be concerned with what is written there about cowls, drawers or scapulars? Or indeed, with tunics or woollen garments worn next to the skin, when the monthly purging of the humours must avoid such things?<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction**

Of all the intellectual and practical problems inherent within the monastic life, a particularly intractable set of questions related to the *cura monialium* (the care of nuns). How could women religious preserve their bodily and mental purity whilst maintaining the contact with the outside world that was necessitated by their physical bodies, which had material requirements? How could they ensure that their spiritual requirements were met, if their bodies meant that they were barred from holding priestly office? Given their different humoral complexion, how could they purge their excesses and maintain equilibrium, whilst also maintaining spiritual and bodily purity? If women were weak, how could they exercise leadership? If they exercised leadership, how could they remain feminine, and avoid disturbing the social and religious order?

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<sup>1</sup> Heloise, 'Letter 6', in Luscombe (ed. and trans), *Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, p. 221.

In the twelfth century, these questions were explored with renewed interest, as the scholastic method was applied to the fields of learning.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, renewed attention to the practical applications of monastic education has demonstrated that the apparent dichotomy between the cloister and the schoolroom was more rhetorical than real: monks – and sometimes nuns – were avid consumers of the latest *summae*, hot from the scriptorium, and nowhere was this more visible than in discussions of the form and function of monastic legislation.<sup>3</sup> Heloise’s letter to Abelard was thus an important intervention in ongoing debates about the purpose of the religious life, the form and function of monastic rules and customs, and the tensions between contemplation and action, body and spirit, interior and exterior, which were given new relevance in the twelfth century due to a massive expansion in both the forms of the religious life, and the numbers of men and women who entered the religious orders.<sup>4</sup>

The proliferation of new forms of religious life was brought to an end, officially, by canon 13 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215: anyone wishing to join a religious order, or to found a religious house, should pick from options that had already received papal approval.<sup>5</sup> But despite the concerns raised at the Fourth Lateran Council, the diversification of monastic lifestyles and legislation in the twelfth century had not been one of untrammelled experimentation; instead, it had paid close attention to words and texts. Both before and after

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<sup>2</sup> Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, pp. 1-15. On the development of the schools, see Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*; Stock, *Implications of literacy*; Southern, *Scholastic humanism*. For the reception of Aristotle’s ideas on the body, see Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference*, pp. 105-165; Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 229-78. For the codification of canon law in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see Winroth, *Making of Gratian’s Decretum*; Hartmann and Pennington, *History of medieval canon law*.

<sup>3</sup> For nuns’ interest in scholastic texts, see Bynum, *Resurrection of the body*, pp. 117-155; Griffiths, *Garden of Delights*.

<sup>4</sup> Constable, *Reformation of the twelfth century*; Constable, ‘Diversity of religious life’, pp. 29-47; Griffiths, ‘Men’s duty’, pp. 1-24; Mews, ‘Negotiating the boundaries of gender’, pp. 113-148; Golding, ‘Authority and discipline’, pp. 87-111. For the difference between rules, statutes and customs, see Melville, ‘Regeln-Consuetudines-Texte-Statuten’, pp. 5-38.

<sup>5</sup> Tanner, *Decrees*, p. 242: ‘Ne nimia religionum diversitas gravem in ecclesia Dei confusionem inducat, firmiter prohibemus, ne quis de caetero novam religionem inveniatur, sed quicumque voluerit ad religionem converti, unam de approbatis assumat. Similiter qui voluerit religiosam domum fundare de novo, regulam et institutionem accipiat de religionis approbatis.’

1215, scholastic methods were applied to problems relating to the form and function of religious life, which were framed and explored as *quaestiones*.<sup>6</sup> Is the religious state perfect? Are vows necessary, and if so, which ones? Is there one form of religious life, or are there many? Is the contemplative life favourable to the active life? The coenobitic to the eremitic?<sup>7</sup>

For the most part, these debates ignored the additional legal and theological ramifications posed by the *cura monialium*. In terms of the theology of the *cura monialium*, the problem lay in reconciling texts which argued for spiritual equality – ‘In Christ there is neither male nor female’ – with texts that emphasised bodily difference and subordination.<sup>8</sup> In terms of legal frameworks, monastic legislation for women had to reconcile prohibitions on male and female cohabitation with explicit guidance that communities of religious women were to be subjected to male oversight and guardianship.<sup>9</sup> Prohibitions against cohabitation – which appear at both conciliar and ecumenical levels from the sixth century onwards – were often ignored in practice; as late as the early twelfth century, Robert of Arbrissel’s new foundations were designed to house both men and women, in complementary roles.<sup>10</sup> But by the time that Heloise was writing, the Second Lateran Council (1139) had reiterated prohibitions on male and female cohabitation (although the relevant canons were aimed explicitly at clerical marriage and concubinage), and a range of legislation that called for the segregation of male

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<sup>6</sup> On Dominican legislation for men, see Galbraith, *Constitution of the Dominican Order*; Vicaire, ‘L’ordre de Saint Dominique en 1215’, pp. 5-38; Tugwell, ‘Evolution of Dominican structures of government I’, pp. 5-60; idem, ‘Evolution of Dominican structures of government II’, pp. 5-109. On legislation for Dominican women, see Lehmijoki-Gardner, ‘Writing religious rules’, pp. 660-87; Smith, ‘Prouille, Madrid, Rome’, pp. 340-352; eadem, ‘*Clausura districta*’, pp. 13-26; eadem, ‘Apostolic Vocation’, pp. 4-33.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2:2, Qu.186-189.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 3:28. On subordination, see Børresen, *Subordination and equivalence*; Minnis, ‘*De impedimento sexus*’, pp. 109–39. For the *cura monialium* as an opportunity for male spiritual development, see Griffiths, *Nuns’ priests’ tales*.

<sup>9</sup> Early legislation prohibiting cohabitation, including canons 18 and 20 of the Second Council of Nicaea II (787), is discussed in Stramara, ‘Double monasticism in the Greek East’, pp. 269-312.

<sup>10</sup> For the development of the order of Fontevraud, see Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*; Kerr, *Religious Life for Women*; Venarde, ‘Robert of Arbrissel’, pp. 329-40. For the relationship between Fontevraud and the Paraclete, see Mews, ‘Negotiating the boundaries’.

and female monastic communities had been brought together in the relevant sections of the *Decretum*.<sup>11</sup>

In her commentary Heloise drew upon the renewed interest in philosophy and the natural sciences to argue that women were different, physiologically, and therefore needed different rules: different yokes for different folks, if you will.<sup>12</sup> If Benedict had modified his Rule to take into account the differing needs of the old and the young, or the weak and the sick, what would a hypothetical rule for women have looked like? In thinking about modifiers, Heloise drew attention to the relationship between bodies, words and gender, in an age and a locale which was newly sensitized to the intricacies of language.<sup>13</sup> The language of monastic rules and customs provided linguistic clothes – a habit – which was tailored to a male body; earlier adaptations of the Rule of Benedict for female communities had its modified pronouns, but had left the structures and offices untouched.<sup>14</sup> In a neat rhetorical pincer movement she undercut the hegemony and integrity of the Benedictine Rule itself: if rules were works of men, and concerned with regulating externalities rather than internalities (that is, bodies and behaviours, rather than intentions and spirits), then they could and should be modified. Augustinian canons lived by different rules: why, then, should women not be afforded the same latitude?<sup>15</sup> If rules were concerned with the regulation of bodies as well as spirits, then women's bodies required rules that offered a better fit.

Certainly those who laid down rules for monks were not only completely silent about women but prescribed regulations which they knew to be quite unsuitable

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<sup>11</sup> Lateran II, canons 6-8: printed in Tanner, *Decrees*, p. 198; *Decretum*, C.18, q.2, cc.20-5: printed in Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, vol I, pp. 834-6.

<sup>12</sup> Posa, 'Specialiter', pp. 1-17.

<sup>13</sup> For general discussion, see Ziolkowski, *Alain of Lille's Grammar of Sex*.

<sup>14</sup> Jayatilaka, 'Old English Benedictine Rule', pp. 147-87; Bodarwé, 'Eine Männerregel für Frauen', pp. 235-72.

<sup>15</sup> Heloise, 'Letter 6', trans. by Luscombe, p. 233.

for them, and this showed plainly enough that the necks of bullock and heifer should in no sense be brought under the same yoke of a common Rule, since those whom nature created unequal cannot properly be made equal in labour.<sup>16</sup>

As Heloise noted, bodily differences were often glossed over in silence: women continued to be absent from the legislation of many of the new orders of the twelfth century, even when they were present within their communities and chapters.<sup>17</sup> In his response to her letter, even Abelard ducked Heloise's challenge to indulge in some *écriture féminine*. His initial response was to defend the essential neutrality of monastic guidance, emphasising spiritual equality over bodily difference.<sup>18</sup> Whilst this response had a sound theological underpinning, it did not resolve the legal and practical issue relating to the *cura monialium*: that women should be governed by men, but that monks and nuns should not live together. In his second letter Abelard created a patchwork of material from existing monastic and patristic texts – mostly addressed to men, but some addressed to women – to create a new rule for Heloise's community at the Paraclete.<sup>19</sup> Here, he placed greater emphasis on bodily difference, setting out a symbiotic relationship in which male servants (both priests and laybrothers) would benefit from their proximity to the Brides (the nuns) and their Bridegroom, Christ, whilst providing material and spiritual support.<sup>20</sup> This was an attempt to tick both boxes – male guidance and male/female segregation – but which left the practical arrangements far from

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<sup>16</sup> Heloise, 'Letter 6', p. 227. Concerns about the proliferation of rules for nuns form the subject of *Decretum*, C.18, q.2, c.25.

<sup>17</sup> For the complex status of women within the Cistercian order, see Berman, 'Were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?', pp. 824-64; Lester, *Creating Cistercian nuns*; Berman, *White Nuns*. For women in the Premonstratensian order, see Wolbrink, 'Women in the Premonstratensian order', pp.387-408; eadem, 'Necessary priests and brothers', pp. 171-212.

<sup>18</sup> Abelard, 'Letter 7', in Luscombe (ed. and trans), *Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, pp. 260-351.

<sup>19</sup> Printed as 'Letter 8' and 'The Rule', in Luscombe (ed. and trans), *Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, pp. 352-55, 358-517.

<sup>20</sup> The relationship can be read as a mutual one (Griffiths, 'Men's duty', pp. 20-22) or a subordinate one (Golding, 'Authority and discipline', pp. 93-97, 109-10).

clear.<sup>21</sup> The search for monastic rules and customs that would provide a better fit for a female or mixed-sex monastic community did not end here, however.

As Heloise had noted in her critique, men could draw on two different rules: the Benedictine and the Augustinian. The Augustinian Rules – which existed in both male and female versions – met with enthusiastic reception both before and after 1215, in no small part because they were loose fitting: the flexibility of the Rule meant that it could be adopted retrospectively by communities that were already in existence.<sup>22</sup> But whilst male communities that adopted Augustinian rules tended to emphasise preaching and pastoral care, a common thread linking many of the female and mixed communities that drew on Augustinian material – including the Gilbertines and Dominicans, as well as some anchoritic groups – was the idea that strict enclosure was emancipatory. Enclosure could never be total, even for male communities, because of the demands of the body; for female communities questions of enclosure were complicated further by their spiritual needs. Here the Rule of Augustine, with its emphasis on preaching and pastoral care, provided a self-regulating, homeostatic solution to some of the key questions of the *cura monialium*.

### **The Institutes of the Order of Sempringham**

At roughly the same time that Heloise and Abelard were corresponding with each other over a suitable rule for the Paraclete, another body of legislation was taking shape in England, this time for a burgeoning order of double monasteries under the leadership of a charismatic founder, Gilbert of Sempringham. Although the legislation of the Order of Sempringham, known as the *Institutes*, took its final form in the early thirteenth century, almost a century

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<sup>21</sup> On the lack of clarity see Griffiths, 'Men's duty', pp. 13-14; Golding, 'Authority and discipline', pp. 93-97. For the incorporation of elements of Abelard's 'rule' into the statutes of the Paraclete, see Waddell, *Paraclete Statutes*. For its adaptation at the community of Marbach, see Griffiths, 'Brides and Dominae', pp. 57-88.

<sup>22</sup> For the adoption of Augustinian rules by a variety of female communities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see the essays in Griffiths and Hotchin (eds.), *Partners in Spirit*.



after the first group of recluses had gathered at the parish church of Sempringham in Lincolnshire, much of the detail, as well as the overall structure, was in place by the beginning of the 1150s.<sup>23</sup>

Two main narratives of the evolution of the Order and its legislation survive, the first of which is preserved as a prologue to the *Institutes* themselves.<sup>24</sup> Written in the first person, it describes how Gilbert, as rector of the church at Sempringham, had been looking for a charitable outlet for his ecclesiastical revenues.<sup>25</sup> Having failed to find any men who wished to submit to his leadership, Gilbert found some willing female recruits. With help from Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln (d.1148), he enclosed seven women alongside the wall of the church. At this stage he planned no further additions, but in order to mitigate against the risk of gossip and bad practices brought in by serving women, he set out some ground rules: chastity, humility, charity, obedience and perseverance, and renunciation of the world and all material goods.<sup>26</sup> As an extra layer of insulation he placed a group of male hired labourers, who were responsible for managing his household and estate, under the regulations of Cistercian lay brothers.<sup>27</sup>

A more prolix and exegetically-orientated account is given in Gilbert's *vita*, which took its final form in the early thirteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Here, the story is embellished and expanded, with greater emphasis on the tension between flesh and spirit: in leaving the world the women

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<sup>23</sup> For the creation of the *Institutes* see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 71-137; Sykes, *Inventing Sempringham*, pp. 161-207. The text of the surviving manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, ff. xii<sup>v</sup>-187<sup>v</sup>) is printed, with minor errors and without the preceding list of chapter headings (ff. vii<sup>r</sup>-xii<sup>r</sup>), in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 6, pt. 2, pp. xix-lviii.

<sup>24</sup> *Monasticon*, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>25</sup> *Monasticon*, p. xix.

<sup>26</sup> *Monasticon*, p. xix.

<sup>27</sup> *Monasticon*, p. xix: 'Similiter cum non haberem nisi seculares qui preessent substantiae domus mee et agriculturae, simili modo et ordine per omnia in labore multo et uictu pauperimo ut predixi de laicis sororibus, assumpsi mihi mercenarios dans eis habitum religionis qualem habent fratres Cistercienses.'

<sup>28</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, ed. Foreville and trans. Keir. For the composition of the *vita*, see Foreville, *Book of St Gilbert*, pp. lxiii-lxxi; Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 51-70; Sykes, *Inventing Sempringham*, pp. 103-119.

exchange their bodies and worldly goods for a valuable pearl (a symbol of purity).<sup>29</sup> Although they had fleshly bodies they had transcended some of the limitations of the flesh (*in carne essent sed preter carnem uiuerunt*); Gilbert made provision for their remaining bodily needs (*omnia que carnalis indigentie conditio exigit*) and enclosed them on all sides (*clauastro circumquaque clauso*).<sup>30</sup> He wanted them to live in the world but not be of the world; to be separated from their lands, family and the paternal home; to put earthly cares behind them and arouse the desire of the King of Kings with their beauty.<sup>31</sup> Their enclosure and exile was not, in spite of the syntax, complete: fleshly needs would dictate the physical layout of the cloister. A single window was left open, to cater for inescapable human needs.<sup>32</sup> A group of serving girls were recruited to minister at the window, preserving the enclosure of the nuns and providing an extra layer of insulation.<sup>33</sup> Finally, ‘because women’s efforts achieve little without help from men’, he added a group of lay brothers to take on some of the heavier, external tasks.<sup>34</sup> Gilbert’s talent was doubled, and, with a nod to the *Song of Songs*, ‘the joints of the thighs of the bride were linked together like a necklace made by a craftsman’s hand.’<sup>35</sup>

The body that Gilbert created is depicted as having a group of women religious at its core. The physical needs of the body were met by its limbs (the lay sisters and lay brothers), via the window that had been left open (*fenestra tantum patente per quam necessaria intromitterentur*).<sup>36</sup> The spiritual needs of the community were met by its head, Gilbert, who

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<sup>29</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>31</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>32</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 34: ‘Illud enim tamen foramen reliquerat apertum tempore tantum congruo aperiendum, quod etiam perpetuo obserasset si homines sine rebus humanis uiuere potuissent.’

<sup>33</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 36: ‘Sane quoniam sine solatio uirili parum proficit sollicitudo feminea, assumpsit mares et eos exterioribus et grauioribus illarum prefecit operibus quos habuit domus sue et agriculture famulos.’

<sup>35</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 38: Ecce talentum duplicatum quod quasi simplum accepit in feminis et quasi duplum ex feminis simul et maribus adquisiuit. Ecce “iunctura feminum sponse quasi monilia que fabricate sunt manu artificis”.

<sup>36</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 32.

acted as its leader and surrogate bridegroom, using a door to which he had the only key.<sup>37</sup> By enclosing their bodies, he would set their souls free.<sup>38</sup> This solution, whether ad hoc or post hoc, had the merits of complying with discordant passages of canon law: Gilbert was able to provide spiritual guidance and material sustenance whilst preserving a degree of separation and enclosure.<sup>39</sup>

Soon, this composite body would outgrow its original confines. Willingly or unwillingly, Gilbert and his community attracted additional female recruits: his talent continued to multiply; the vine put forth new shoots; the fruitful seed was scattered throughout the land; new sites were proposed and accepted.<sup>40</sup> As the number of recruits grew, new solutions had to be sought.<sup>41</sup> Again, the prologue to the *Institutes* provides the basic narrative: when the numbers increased, after his initial approach to the Cistercians was rebuffed, Gilbert added canons who would follow the Rule of Augustine and whose access to the women of the community was to be regulated with great care.<sup>42</sup> Gilbert's *vita*, on the other hand, adds a healthy dose of metaphor and an awareness of the strictures of canon law to this rather lean account. Compelled by necessity, he added a group of men to replicate and extend his original role:

He chose men for their ability, scholars for their skill in ruling others, clerks in order to exercise authority over the church in accordance with law; men to look

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<sup>37</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Decretum*, C.18, q.2, c.22 (Monachi et monachae in nullo loco simul cohabitent loci) and c.24 (Puellarum monasteria monachorum presidio et ministracione regantur).

<sup>40</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> On expansion, see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 26-33.

<sup>42</sup> *Monasticon*, p. xix: 'Omnino repulsam sustinui, qua necessitate cognante associaui mihi clericos ad regimen et custodiam earum et eorum qui laboribus exterioribus se dederant ut in uigiliis et ieiuniis uitam secundum regulam sancti Augustini tenerent, et remoti a sanctimonialibus nullum accessum ad eas haberent, nisi ad illas que morti proxime unctione et uiatico indigerent.'

after women, scholars to open the way of salvation to both men and women, and clerks to supply the pastoral office to all.<sup>43</sup>

Here, there was a tension not simply between flesh and spirit, but between the law and the Law. Women, as weaker vessels, required male guidance and leadership, but men and women were forbidden from living within the same community.<sup>44</sup> A new form of life was required, which would replicate the arrangements of the original anchorhold but on a larger scale.<sup>45</sup> Gilbertine texts place great stress on the physical segregation of men and women: mass would be celebrated in a conventual church divided by a wall, so that the men could neither see nor be seen by the women; the canons' oratory and cloister were to be built at a distance from the nuns' enclosure.<sup>46</sup> The canons would also be divided from the rest of the community in another way: they would follow the Rule of Augustine, whilst the nuns (and, implicitly, the lay brothers and lay sisters) would follow the Rule of Benedict.<sup>47</sup> In Gilbert's *vita*, the order is described as the 'chariot of Aminadab': a vehicle with two sides (one male, one female) and four wheels (two male, two female), drawn by two beasts (the Rules of Augustine and Benedict under the control of one driver, Gilbert.<sup>48</sup> Whilst this could create liturgical headaches (Benedictines and Augustinians followed different cursuses), placing the canons of the order under the Rule of Augustine made both practical and symbolic sense: the canons

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<sup>43</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, pp. 44-6: 'Hac itaque diuina ordinatione, ut credi fas est, commonitus, hac necessitate compulsus, uocauit in partem sollicitudinis, et omnium quos adunauerat regimini prefecit, uiros litteratos et ecclesiasticis ordinibus insignatos: uiros ut possent, litteratos ut nossent regere ceteros, ordinatos ut ecclesie iure ualere preesse; uiros qui tuerentur mulieres, litteratos qui tam uiris quam mulieribus uiam panderent salutis, clericos qui omnibus pastorale officium exhiberent.'

<sup>44</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 46: 'Hoc autem nutu Dei et consilio fecit uirorum sanctorum et sapientum, quoniam, sicuti patrum decreta diffiniunt, necesse est ut monasteria puellarum presidio et administratione monachorum uel clericorum regantur.' The references are to the *Decretum*, C.18, q.2, cc.21-4.

<sup>45</sup> For the practice of anchoritism and enclosure in England in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, see Licence, *Hermits and recluses*, pp. 72-89.

<sup>46</sup> *Monasticon*, p. xix: 'Nam missarum sollempnia celebrantur pariete interposito ne uideant uel uideantur mares a feminis. Oratorium uero canonicorum et domus et claustrum eorum longius a curte et clausura sanctimonialium disiunguntur, et excluduntur quemadmodum et conuersorum.' See also *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 46. The emphasis on physical segregation may well be retrospective: see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, pp. 50-2. For discussion of the image, see Burton, 'Chariot of Aminadab', pp. 26-42; Sorrentino, 'In houses of nuns, in houses of canons', pp. 361-72.

would serve as priests for the community, ‘feeding’ it with spiritual sustenance whilst renewing themselves by following their own *cursus*:

For our sister, this same congregation, is still very small and does not have the breasts [*ubera*] of prelates or preachers to feed her with milk, to sustain her with solid food, to set the internal things in order, to protect the exterior, and to strengthen her on all sides and in all places.<sup>49</sup>

In a Gilbertine context, Cistercian-style metaphors of the priest/abbot as mother took on new homeostatic and symbiotic resonances.<sup>50</sup> Alongside the emphasis on segregation and diversity, Gilbertine texts place repeated emphasis on the unity of the community, in which diverse groups would form a body with one heart and one soul.<sup>51</sup> Within this hybrid male/female body, there was no simple division between men/spirit and women/flesh. The canons catered for spiritual needs of the nuns, laybrothers and sisters; the canons and laybrothers provided a point of contact with the outside world, buying and selling goods to meet the physical needs of the community. All money and goods produced by the community remained the property of the nuns, who prepared the food, wove the cloth, and washed the clothes. Within an expanded anchorhold, they were both Martha and Mary.

This expanded anchorhold required a more detailed legislative framework to prevent it from collapse, and to balance the tensions between inner-inner (spiritual), inner-outer (physical) and outer-outer (the wider world). In response, Gilbert and his followers compiled a complex

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<sup>49</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 43: ‘Soror nempe nostra, congregatio scilicet ista, adhuc paruula est, et ubera non habet prepositorum et predicatorum qui eam lacte nutriant, solido cibo sustentent, interius disponant, exterius protegant, undique et ubique confirmant.’ For comparisons with other Augustinian groups that practised the *cura monialium*, see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>50</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 110-169.

<sup>51</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 48: ‘His ita dispositis, quoniam omnes tam mares quam feminas in unitatem societatis et uinculum pacis uocauerat, ut per unum in uno omnes perduceret ad unum, multitudinis fecit cor unum et animam unam in Deo, singulis pro sexu, etate et gradu certum uite modum presignans et metam ultra quam citraque nequit procedure rectum.’

set of customs (the *Institutes*) to supplement the more general guidance offered by the Rules of Benedict and Augustine. Some of this material was adapted from existing sources, most notably Cistercian legislative texts; there is, however, little to suggest that Gilbert was drawing on other sources from which one might have expected him to draw inspiration, such as the earlier double communities of Fontevraud or Prémontré.<sup>52</sup> Nor was there an extensive corpus of legislative material for anchorites upon which Gilbert could draw: whilst eremitism and anchoritism were as old, if not older than coenobitism itself, it was not until the latter part of the twelfth century that the spiritual and legislative frameworks of the anchoritic life began to receive more sustained attention.<sup>53</sup> Gilbert, like Heloise, was not afraid to innovate when existing sources failed to provide a solution to contemporary problems:

The regulations which govern institutions differ and need changing as reasons arise, in accordance with place, time and persons. Therefore when he did not find enough in those rules for the monastic life he had established in this way, he picked what he needed like so many beautiful flowers from the statutes and customs of many churches and monasteries, collecting and choosing those he considered more vital and more relevant to human beings in all their weakness.<sup>54</sup>

In the surviving manuscript of the Gilbertine *Institutes* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136) these 'beautiful flowers' are arranged into subsections; a contents list at the beginning of the

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<sup>52</sup> For models and options, see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 91-101. For the use of Cistercian material, see Sykes, *Inventing Sempringham*, pp. 171-88. Although Gilbert may well have been aware of the existence of Fontevraud, the earliest Fontevraudine houses in England were not founded until the mid-1150s, by which time the bulk of the Gilbertine legislation was already in place: see Kerr, *Religious Life for women*, pp. 64-100.

<sup>53</sup> Licence, *Hermits and recluses*, pp. 68, 72-4, 86-7, argues that whilst there is evidence of reclusion in England from the late eleventh century onwards, there is little evidence of any awareness of the earliest rule for recluses, that of Grimlaic (composed c.900-950), before the 1150s; the first sustained attempt to define and regulate the *ordo* of recluses comes in Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, compiled in the 1160s. *De institutione inclusarum* is printed in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia. Vol. I: Opera Ascetica*, pp. 637-82.

<sup>54</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 49: 'Et quia pro locis et temporibus personisque ex causis incidentibus uariantur et mutari oportet iura constitutionem, ea que minus in illis regulis inuenit ad sic datam normam sufficientia a multarum ecclesiarum et monasteriorum statutis et consuetudinibus, quasi flores quosdam pulcherrimos, excerpit, collegit et preelegit que magis necessaria et competentiora sic infirmatis hominibus iudicauit.'

manuscript (ff.vii<sup>f</sup>-xii<sup>f</sup>) subdivides the *Institutes* into an introductory section combining Gilbert's prologue and the chapters relating to the Office of Master (10 chapters); a section on the scrutators and scrutatrices (14 chapters); a section on procurators (16 chapters); a section on the canons (38 chapters); a section on the laybrothers (34 chapters); a section on nuns (35 chapters); a section on laysisters (5 chapters); a section on sick nuns and sisters (5 chapters); a section on the Office of the Dead (6 chapters); a section of chapters pertaining to both nuns and laysisters (10 chapters); a chapter on unity of the houses (6 chapters); and a section on the general chapter (6 chapters).<sup>55</sup> In contrast with Heloise's insistence on the need for rules that took gendered differences into account, and in spite of the *vita*'s emphasis on the need for variation according to place, time and person, at first glance the Gilbertine statutes seem relatively unconcerned with such matters: statutes designed for men were to be observed by women when appropriate, and vice versa.<sup>56</sup>

But in the conception of the monastic community as a hermaphroditic body which had male and female component parts Gilbertine legislation paid much greater attention to place, time and persons. Whilst the presence of windows and doors in mixed communities was not new – Rudolf of Fulda's ninth-century *vita* of Leoba of Bischofsheim refers to the windows at the mixed community at Wimbourne, Dorset, in which she spent her earlier years – the Gilbertines developed their use to new levels.<sup>57</sup> References to windows and doors are embedded throughout the Gilbertine *Institutes*, demonstrating their importance to the correct functioning of the male/female body: they are not restricted to the sections on nuns and lay sisters.

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<sup>55</sup> This chapter list is omitted in *Monasticon* edition; as a result, the chapter numbering varies between the manuscript and printed edition, most notably in the section on the canons.

<sup>56</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, p. 54: 'Preter illam enim quam caritas texit cordium unitatem, quecunque instituta uirorum apta sunt uite mulierum uel que a mulieribus ad uiros transferri possunt, salua honestate et regulam quas professi sunt tenere, propter pacem et concordiam iussit altrinsecus obseruari.' *Monasticon*, p. xxxvi: 'Quaecumque scripta sunt fratribus uel canonicis quae vitae et religioni sanctimonialium vel sororum prodesse cognoscuntur, fideliter ab eis seruentur, et e conuerso.'

<sup>57</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, 'Life of Leoba', in Talbot (ed. and trans.) *Anglo-Saxon missionaries*, p. 207.

Different windows had different functions: the large window (*magna fenestra*), also known as the turning window (*fenestra versatilis*) was used for transmitting food from the nuns' quarters to the refectory of the canons, and for returning any leftovers.<sup>58</sup> It was to be one-and-a-half to two feet high, kept firmly locked when out of use, and when in use, staffed by a team of reputable individuals rather than a single, permanent member of staff.<sup>59</sup> Given its size, it may also have been the window where money could be deposited and withdrawn.<sup>60</sup> Whilst the men of the community were permitted to retain some petty cash, for larger purchases a faithful brother would be sent to the sisters' window (*fenestra sororum*) to ask for money; the amount would be carefully recorded, and receipts and leftover money were to be returned to the nuns via the same means.<sup>61</sup> The larger window was to be accompanied by a little window (*fenestra parvula*), which could be used for conveying important messages, such as the numbers for lunch each day, or the amount of money required for a particular purchase.<sup>62</sup> There were at least two of these small windows, which were to be no more than a finger in length and a finger in breadth, covered with a metal plate. One was to be used for confession (this may be the window mentioned earlier, which was constructed in the wall of the church or the infirmary); the other might be used for talking with relatives and other reputable persons, although under the usual system of supervision and regulation.<sup>63</sup> Finally, there was a great gate (*magna porta*), which could be used to permit the ingress and egress of carts and other vehicles which were required for transporting nuns as well as goods.<sup>64</sup>

Some contact points serviced spiritual needs: in the conventual church a door pierced the dividing wall, enabling carefully-regulated physical expressions of community which took

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<sup>58</sup> Canons 28: *Monasticon*, pp. xxxiii-iv (incorrectly numbered as Canons 27).

<sup>59</sup> Canons 21; Nuns 6: *Monasticon*, pp. xxxii (where it is incorrectly numbered as Canons 20) and xlv.

<sup>60</sup> Nuns 2; Brothers 11: *Monasticon*, pp. xlv, xxxix-xl.

<sup>61</sup> Procurators 1; Procurators 16: *Monasticon* p. xxiv.

<sup>62</sup> Canons 21; Canons 23: *Monasticon* pp. xxxii-iii (where they are incorrectly numbered as Canons 20 and 22)

<sup>63</sup> Nuns 6: *Monasticon*, p. xlv.

<sup>64</sup> Nuns 6: *Monasticon*, p. xlv.



place on feast days.<sup>65</sup> There were also windows for confession, communion and unction: some of these were located in the conventual church, whilst others were in the infirmary or at other locations within the claustral complex.<sup>66</sup> But by far the greater number of these contact points were concerned with bodily needs, chiefly food and clothing. As mentioned earlier, the nuns (assisted by the lay sisters) were responsible for the material needs of the communities' bodies, and controlled all of the food, clothing, and money (in terms of both cash gifts and money raised by selling surplus produce).<sup>67</sup> Three suitable women were put in charge of this property: they held the keys to the chests (which had multiple locks to prevent any one person from opening them illicitly) and the conventual seal; they were also in charge of sewing, distributing and laundering the clothing of the community.<sup>68</sup> To ensure staffing levels the sisters would attend services on alternate days; to avoid overfamiliarity they were to use the third person when discussing business matters at the window.<sup>69</sup> On the male side of the community four men (the prior, subprior, and two lay brothers) were appointed at each house as procurators; they were charged with buying and selling goods, and looking after 'all those things which ought by right to be in the charge of men.'<sup>70</sup> In addition to the four procurators the *Institutes* also refer to the *frater fenestrae* or *fenestrarius*, who was to give and receive goods and orders.<sup>71</sup> On both a practical and symbolic level, this division of goods and services made sense: it emphasised the centrality of the nuns within the community, and put their heavily-enclosed cloister to good use. It also ensured that the community would work in symbiosis: neither the male nor female parts could operate entirely independently of one another. The windows and doors, overlooked in most discussions of enclosure, provided a

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<sup>65</sup> Canons 18; Nuns 24: *Monasticon*, pp. xxxi (incorrectly numbered as Canons 17) and xlii.

<sup>66</sup> Sick Nuns 1-2: *Monasticon*, p. liii.

<sup>67</sup> See above for the Prologue; see also Nuns 2 (*Monasticon*, p. xliv).

<sup>68</sup> Nuns 3 : *Monasticon*, pp. xliv-xlv.

<sup>69</sup> Nuns 7; Nuns 9 : *Monasticon*, pp. xlv-xlvi.

<sup>70</sup> Brothers 11: *Monasticon*, p. xxxix.

<sup>71</sup> Nuns 8: *Monasticon*, p. xlvi

vital point of contact between the male and female quarters, welding two communities into a single, hybrid body.

As with the chariot of Aminadab, pulled by beasts of different size (the Rules of Augustine and Benedict), there is some confusion as to how this system might have worked in practice. Whilst the *Institutes* are clear about the function of the windows, their number and location is less clear. In the chapters relating to the canons there are repeated references to a large turning window and an accompanying smaller window, which would be built in the refectory of the canons.<sup>72</sup> In the chapters relating to the nuns, however, more detailed regulations are given which suggest that a large and small window would be housed in a separate structure, the *domus fenestrae*.<sup>73</sup> Here, the plan of the mixed house of Watton, East Yorkshire, is sometimes reproduced to illustrate the form that Gilbertine communities would have taken in real life.<sup>74</sup> Large parts of the plan are conjectural, however, based on William St John Hope's reading of the Gilbertine *Institutes* and his familiarity with Cistercian architecture; subsequent surveys of the site, along with aerial photography and archaeology from other Gilbertine sites, suggest that the the Gilbertine body came in a variety of shapes and sizes.<sup>75</sup>

In the end, the precise physical form taken by the community was less important than the integration and segregation of its male and female halves. It did not really matter where the windows and doors were located, as long as they were subject to strict surveillance; it did not really matter how large or small the nuns' enclosure was, as long as it was strictly enclosed. Only in rare cases could the nuns' cloister be breached, and then, as we might expect from a

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<sup>72</sup> Canons 21: *Monasticon*, p. xxii (incorrectly numbered as Canons 20).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Nuns 5 ('Et si quis canonicus uel frater accesserit ad fenestram domus sue sine assensu prioris domus...Que loquenda sunt necessaria in utroque sexu ad fenestram uersatilem ubi uictualia secularium ministrantur...') with Nuns 6 ('Canonicis uero et fratribus ingressum in domum fenestre interdicimus...') and Nuns 7 ('Prepositus et cellerarius sine scrutatrice comite non ingrediantur domum fenestre nisi ad rationandum de expensa pecunie et hoc ubi uersatiles habentur fenestre'): *Monasticon*, pp. xlv-xlvi.

<sup>74</sup> St John Hope, 'Gilbertine Priory of Watton', pp. 1-34; reproduced in Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 93.

<sup>75</sup> Chapman and Fenwick, 'Contextualising previous excavation', pp. 81-90.

community given to legislative prolixity, there were strict and extensive regulations. No one could enter the nuns' quarters whilst they were saying the offices (serving their spiritual needs), or eating or sleeping (meeting physical needs).<sup>76</sup> The only exceptions were in the case of fire or imminent danger of death, or under threat of robbery or brigandage.<sup>77</sup> Male members of the community who committed serious crimes would be expelled; female members would be imprisoned in a separate little cell (*domuncula*) within the claustral precinct for the rest of their lives, to avoid the threat of scandal to the order.<sup>78</sup> Their only point of contact with the outside world would be a window, through which their spiritual and physical needs could be met.

The *domuncula* – the cell within the cloister within the community – is both the beginning and the endpoint of the Gilbertine regime of the senses.<sup>79</sup> The system of windows prevented visual and physical contact, but permitted oral/aural communication and the exchange of goods which allowed the spiritual and material needs of the community and its members to be met. Rather than a binary male/female pairings of the Paraclete or Fontevraud (bride/groom, servant/master), the Gilbertines depicted themselves as a single body, in which male and female elements fused to create an institutional form that was female on the inside, and male on the outside.

### **The Institutes of San Sisto, Rome**

By way of a coda I wish to turn to an apparently unrelated body of material, namely the statutes and customs of early Dominican communities for women that antedate the formal institution of a Second Order in 1259. Perceptions of the early history of the Dominican

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<sup>76</sup> Nuns 10: *Monasticon*, p. xlvi.

<sup>77</sup> Nuns 10 : *Monasticon*, p. xlvi

<sup>78</sup> Brothers 29: *Monasticon*, p. xliii

<sup>79</sup> For a possible reference to the use of a *domuncula* to incarcerate the subject of a scandal, see Aelred of Rievaulx, 'De sanctimoniali de Wattun', cols. 789-96.

order, and the role of women within it, owe much to the work of Jordan of Saxony, Dominic's successor as Master of the Order, and his narrative of the foundation of the Order (the *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*).<sup>80</sup> In Jordan's account Dominic is presented, as is the norm in saintly *vitae*, as an accidental founder. Starting out as an Augustinian canon at Osma, Dominic and his bishop, Diego, became caught up in a Cistercian preaching campaign against Cathar heretics. Diego's methods – supplementing preaching with teaching by example, soon began to reap rewards, including ex-Cathar women. As in Gilbertine origin narratives, the foundation at Prouille is depicted in Jordan's account as something serendipitous: a happy accident that was both a source and proof of divine approval.<sup>81</sup> In contrast with Gilbertine narratives, however, the community at Prouille is presented as part of a primordial phase, when the order was planned but had not yet taken shape.<sup>82</sup> The *cura monialium* provided an outlet for material and spiritual resources, but it did not dictate institutional form. By the time Dominic was on his deathbed, according to Jordan, his earlier enthusiasm towards female converts had been replaced by increasing wariness of the dangers of female flesh:

He summoned twelve of the more sensible brethren to his sickbed and exhorted them to be fervent and to foster the religious life of the Order and to preserve in the way of holiness, and he advised them to avoid keeping dubious company with women, particularly young women, because they are a real temptation, all too liable to ensnare souls which are not yet completely purified. "Look at me", he said, "God's mercy has preserved me to this day in bodily virginity, but I confess

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<sup>80</sup> Jordan of Saxony, 'Libellus', pp. 1-88. On the early history of the order, see Tugwell, 'Notes on the life of St Dominic', pp. 5-169. On the importance of the second generation in reform processes, see Vanderputten, *Monastic reform as process*.

<sup>81</sup> Jordan of Saxony, 'Libellus', ch. 27. For discussion of the foundation of Prouille and its place within the Dominican order see Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, vol. I, pp. 235-74; Tugwell, 'For whom was Prouille founded?', pp. 5-66; Smith, 'Prouille, Madrid, Rome', pp. 342-6.

<sup>82</sup> Jordan of Saxony, 'Libellus', ch. 37.

that I have not escaped from the imperfection of being more excited by the conversation of young women than by being talked at by old women.”<sup>83</sup>

In 1228, this wariness was given legislative form; the Friars Preachers were forbidden to exercise or accept the *cura monialium*, under penalty of excommunication.<sup>84</sup> With the exception of this passage, nuns have no place in the earliest surviving Dominican legislation. Their position within the order was in frequent dispute until 1259, when the statutes of the Second Order were promulgated.<sup>85</sup> But at least three Dominican communities for women were in existence before 1228, namely Prouille, Madrid and San Sisto, Rome. In early Dominican narratives the community at Madrid, like the earlier foundation at Prouille, is presented as an ad-hoc response to charismatic preaching, rather than a routinised attempt to create a female order.<sup>86</sup> The third community – San Sisto at Rome – was the outcome of a very different process.

In 1219 Honorius III approached Dominic with a request for help in reforming the female communities in Rome; in 1221 nuns from across Rome transferred to the convent at San Sisto where they were joined by a group of nuns from Prouille.<sup>87</sup> The legislation of San Sisto has survived, embedded in a series of papal confirmations and reconfirmations for the Penitents of St Mary Magdalene, Speyer.<sup>88</sup> Given that nuns transferred from Prouille to San Sisto, Marie-Humbert Vicaire argued that the customs of San Sisto drew on a rule from Prouille (of

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<sup>83</sup> Jordan of Saxony, ‘Libellus’, ch. 92, translation in Tugwell (ed.), *Early Dominicans: selected writings*, p. 92.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas (ed.), *De oudste Constituties van de Dominicanen*, p. 360: ‘In virtute spiritu sancti et sub poena excommunicationis districe prohibemus, ne aliquis fratrum nostrorum de cetero laboret vel procuret, ut cura et custodia monialium vel quarunlibet aliarum mulierum nostris fratribus committatur... Prohibemus etiam ne aliquis de cetero aliquam tondeat vel induat vel ad professionem.’

<sup>85</sup> ‘Liber constitutionem sororum Ordinis Praedicatorum’, pp. 337-348.

<sup>86</sup> An early letter from Dominic to the prioress of Madrid is printed in Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 394.

<sup>87</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, vol. II, p.p. 182-8, 278-90; Koudelka, ‘Le Monasterium Tempuli’, pp. 5-81; Bolton, ‘Daughters of Rome’, pp. 101-15.

<sup>88</sup> The statutes are printed in Simon, *L’ordre des penitentes*, pp. 142-53. For discussion see Simon, *L’ordre des penitentes*, pp. 29-46; Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, pp. 386-96; G. Cariboni, ‘Zur Datierung’, pp. 389-418; Smith, ‘Prouille, Madrid, Rome’, pp. 350-1; eadem, ‘Clausura districta’, p. 19.

which no independent trace survives), and that the legislation of Prouille drew in turn from Cistercian texts.<sup>89</sup> Julie Ann Smith, in contrast, sees the foundation of San Sisto as a turning point in the Dominican order's relationship with communities of women, which encouraged the production of legislation, removing the need to posit a hypothetical corpus of legislation for Prouille.<sup>90</sup> But if the *Institutes* of San Sisto did not come from Prouille, where did they come from?

The earliest sections of the legislation of San Sisto are similar in content to material from the earliest Dominican statutes for men.<sup>91</sup> The material in the second half (chapters 16-23), which relates to the enclosure of the community, bears little relationship to early legislation for men; nor does it appear to draw on early Premonstratensian legislation for women.<sup>92</sup> Smith points to the influence of Innocent III (who had initiated the process of reform at San Sisto), or Cardinal Ugolino (the future Gregory IX), who had taken an active role in the enclosure of the Franciscan sisters (under the Benedictine Rule).<sup>93</sup> Instead, I would like to suggest that the legislation of San Sisto drew, at least in part, on the Gilbertine *Institutes*.<sup>94</sup> The Gilbertines have often been regarded as a local order for local people, but in 1220 they were at the zenith of their fame.<sup>95</sup> Their founder had recently been canonised;<sup>96</sup> in 1207 Innocent III had approached the Gilbertine order for help in reforming the Roman nunneries.<sup>97</sup> For many reasons, the Gilbertines failed to respond to the call, but their brief association with the

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<sup>89</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, pp. 289, 388-9.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, 'Prouille, Madrid, Rome', pp. 341-6.

<sup>91</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, II, pp. 392-6. The heavy reliance on Premonstratensian material in the earliest legislation for men is illustrated in Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, pp. 455-65.

<sup>92</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, II, p. 391

<sup>93</sup> Smith, 'Prouille, Madrid, Rome', pp. 348, 350. On Franciscan legislation for men, see Brooke, *Coming of the friars*; Robson and Röhrkasten (eds.), *Franciscan organisation*. On Franciscan legislation for women, see Mueller, *Privilege of poverty*; Mooney, *Clare of Assisi*.

<sup>94</sup> A possible connection between chapters 16-19, 22-23 and Gilbertine material is suggested by Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, II, pp. 289, 391-2, although he goes on to dismiss it.

<sup>95</sup> Golding, 'Authority and discipline', p. 110.

<sup>96</sup> On the canonisation process, see Foreville, *Procès de canonisation*.

<sup>97</sup> Bolton, 'Daughters of Rome', pp. 111-12; Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 259-261; Smith, 'Prouille, Madrid, Rome', p. 348.

community at San Sisto provides a context in which a copy of the *Institutes* could have come to Dominic's attention.

The most notable similarities between the Gilbertine *Institutes* and the *Institutes* of San Sisto come in the system of windows and doors, and the personnel who serviced them. Here, the significant chapters of the San Sisto legislation were chapters 16 (Windows), 17 (Enclosure), 18 (Things pertaining to the monastery), 22 (Avoiding discord) and 23 (Procurators).<sup>98</sup> Three mature and devout sisters were to be in charge of the parlour window; one was given permission to speak and the others would listen out for anything unsuitable or against their lifestyle, at which point they would shut the conversation down. The prior or prioress would be informed, and a suitable punishment applied. The prioress and cellaresses could also speak with the prior and cellarers about the needs of the convent in the presence of these witnesses.<sup>99</sup> Here the rubric (*De fenestris*) does not entirely match up with the contents of the chapter: the chapter on windows contains little material on the physical dimensions or construction of the windows. Instead, it focuses on the ways in which the window was to be used, and on the regulation of speech.<sup>100</sup> Whilst the lack of detail may reflect the fact that the sisters at San Sisto were moving into existing buildings rather than constructing new ones from scratch, a lack of specifics is also a feature of Gilbertine legislation: windows were important because they made it possible to balance enclosure and contemplation with material and spiritual needs. Their exact size and location was less important than the ways in which they would be used.

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<sup>98</sup> Simon, *L'ordre des penitentes*, pp. 150-51, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Simon, *L'ordre des penitentes*, p. 150.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, 'Clausura districta', pp. 26, 34-5.

This is underlined in the next chapter of the San Sisto legislation, which sets out the rules for enclosure (*De clausura*).<sup>101</sup> Men might not enter the cloister of the nuns unless accompanied by a cardinal, bishop or legate. The provincial prior was to perform a visitation once a year, but otherwise might not visit without permission from the prior general. If a nun was too sick to visit the window to confess or receive communion or unction, then a priest might enter with mature companions to perform the sacrament, but should avoid any unnecessary speech. Any man entering was to be accompanied by two witnesses of good character, and watched over by three nuns. The female window keepers could speak to the male window keepers on business matters; they should not talk to outsiders without permission from the prioress, except in a few specific circumstances (danger of robbery; those seeking a light; those wishing to confess sins and seek absolution). Any woman who broke these rules, except in the case of a cardinal, bishop or legate, would be severely punished. Two additional chapters (18 and 23) cover material needs (*De rebus monasterii*) and the personnel who would service the windows (*De procuratoribus et procuratricibus*).<sup>102</sup> The clearest evidence of a textual link comes in chapter 22, ‘On avoiding discord’ (*De preiudicio uitando*, which uses some of the same phrases as chapter 14 of the section on scrutators in the Gilbertine *Institutes*.<sup>103</sup> Whilst, as Vicaire notes, there may have been a common, underlying source that is now lost to us, this chapter of the Gilbertine *Institutes* has no obvious textual precedent in either Cistercian or Premonstratensian legislation.<sup>104</sup>

Gilbertine legislation has been discounted as a possible source of inspiration for Dominican legislation for women for several reasons. First, and most significant, is the lack of direct textual overlap. Part of this we can attribute to style: the legislation of San Sisto is succinct,

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<sup>101</sup> Simon, *L'ordre des penitentes*, pp. 150-1.

<sup>102</sup> Simon, *L'ordre des penitentes*, pp. 151, 153.

<sup>103</sup> Simon, *L'ordre des penitentes*, p. 153; cf. *Monasticon*, p. xxiv.

<sup>104</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, II, p. 392.



the Gilbertines *Institutes* were prolix.<sup>105</sup> But there is also a question of substance: the Gilbertine *Institutes* were not a Rule – they did not provide a blueprint for monastic practice – but instead provided a series of responses to practical and theoretical questions relating to the *cura monialium*. The repeated references to windows and doors throughout the *Institutes* reflect the ways in which the care of nuns was incorporated in the homeostatic regulation of the monastic body. Just as Gilbertines had taken elements from Cistercian material and used them to flesh out a very different structure, other groups, such as the Dominicans, might apply Gilbertine responses to *quaestiones* of their own.<sup>106</sup> Gilbertine windows and doors could be remodelled to fit Dominican purposes: they could perform different functions in different bodies.

Some of these differences may be overstated. The Gilbertines followed the Benedictine and Augustinian Rules, whilst the Dominicans – including the community at San Sisto – followed the Augustinian. But whilst the differences between the Augustinian and Benedictine Rules were stressed in reformist polemic, in practice there were many similarities and points of contact.<sup>107</sup> The Gilbertine *Institutes* repeatedly stress that nuns were to follow the regulations pertaining to the canons as far as was appropriate, and vice versa; the legislation of San Sisto draws on Benedictine and Augustinian material.<sup>108</sup> The Rules of Augustine and Benedict were different beasts, but in the Gilbertine instance, they pulled the same chariot. It was in the chariots – the communities of the two orders – that the fundamental differences lay. The window was a feature of the primordial Gilbertine community, the anchorhold at Sempringham, and was embedded into the order's legislation at an early date. The windows

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<sup>105</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, II, p. 392.

<sup>106</sup> For a list of correspondences between the Gilbertine *Institutes* and the legislation of San Sisto, see Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique* II, pp. 391-2.

<sup>107</sup> For the interrelationship between Augustinian and Benedictine rules see Clark, *Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, pp. 14, 29, 33.

<sup>108</sup> Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique*, II, pp. 390-1.

and doors were integral to the homeostatic system, and shaped the institutional body that developed around them. The introduction of windows in the legislation of San Sisto, in contrast, enabled a retrospective reshaping of early Dominican history, and a realignment of the Dominican body.

## **Conclusion**

Focussing on the openings in monastic bodies – the windows and doors – provides an opportunity to explore the material as well as the spiritual significance of the monastic community as a gendered body. In its material form the monastic community had physical needs that prevented its complete enclosure. Female monastic communities faced additional problems, as the bodies of women religious debarred them from exercising certain liturgical offices and from fulfilling their spiritual needs.

There were two main responses to this problem: the first and most common response was to assign male servants to female communities. This was an extension of the role of the priest, as servant of God; the material separation of male and female elements meant that there was little to bind them together. It also left unresolved questions of subordination and superiority: how would they make the relationship work when there were at least three people (Bridegroom, Bride, Servant) in the marriage? The Gilbertine solution, on the other hand, incorporated male and female elements into a single, symbolic body (or chariot) which was largely self-sufficient and self-regulating, if asymmetrical. Whilst the precise physical dimensions of the Gilbertine body remain elusive – the archaeology for the communities I discuss is relatively poor – the questions raised and solutions offered in the Gilbertine *Institutes* had practical applications. The system of windows and doors created a body which

was female on the inside and male on the outside; elements of this system could be adopted by other groups who were looking for solutions to the challenges of the *cura monialium*. In a world made flesh, it was an attempt to harness gendered perceptions of bodily difference to the service of spiritual equality.